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UNCLAS TEGUCIGALPA 000861

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/CEN, DRL/PHD, CA/OCS/ACS/WHA, AND DS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [SNAR](#) [KCRM](#) [KJUS](#) [CASC](#) [ASEC](#) [HO](#)

SUBJECT: LA CEIBA PRISON RIOT LEAVES 69 DEAD AND MANY  
OTHERS WOUNDED

REF: 02 TEGUCIGALPA 1755

1. SUMMARY: On April 5 a riot in El Porvenir prison, located just outside the Caribbean port city of La Ceiba, Honduras, left 69 dead and 39 wounded. Many of the dead were gang members from Mara 18, one of Central America's largest gangs.

According to press reports, the riot broke out when a scuffle between inmates turned deadly after Mara 18 gangs members with weapons attacked non-gang member prisoners, who retaliated with weapons. The non-gang inmates then reportedly proceeded to lock the gang members in their cell block and start a fire in the cell block, which killed over thirty gang members. Prison authorities had previously confiscated some weapons in what was apparently not an effective search of the prison. No AmCits were reported among the victims. Post notes that Honduran prisons are known for their poor conditions and lax security. END SUMMARY

2. On April 5 a riot in El Porvenir (The Future) prison, located just outside the Caribbean port city of La Ceiba, Honduras, left 69 dead (66 men and three women) and 39 wounded. According to press reports, the riot broke out around 10 a.m. shortly after visiting hours, when a scuffle between inmates turned deadly after Mara 18 gangs members produced four pistols and a number of machetes and attacked non-gang member prisoners. (Prison authorities had previously confiscated some weapons in what was apparently not an effective search of the prison.) Hundreds of regular prisoners then reportedly brandished weapons of their own, including smuggled grenades, and proceeded to attack Mara 18 members. The facility, which holds 1,600 inmates is a low-security prison farm where suspects facing drugs, weapons, rape, and assault charges are held while they await trial.

3. Of the 69 killed during the riot, 61 were Mara 18 gang members. According to press reports, at least half of those died from smoke inhalation after the cell block where they were trying to take refuge was locked and then set ablaze by other non-gang inmates. The fire department was reportedly unable to enter the prison to put out the fire due to gunfire. The press has reported allegations that some of the inmates were shot and killed by prison guards during the riot. Also included among the victims were three women visiting the prison at the time of the uprising and five regular prisoners. In the past some AmCits awaiting trial have been temporarily detained at El Porvenir but none were present when the riot broke out on April 5.

4. Comment: Security at El Porvenir is notoriously lax. Weapons and drugs are common, and in many instances interned gang members control whole cell blocks. RefTel and the Human Rights Report both describe the poor conditions in Honduran prisons. The GOH is currently investigating the incident, including allegations that prison guards, with the collusion of a privately run prison store, helped smuggle weapons into the prison. End Comment.  
Palmer